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THE COWBOY CLAN IN CUBA.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



"CHARGE, MY GALLANT COWBOY FILIBUSTERS!" CRIED CAPTAIN CHASE.

The Cowboy Clan in Cuba;

OR, THE

Texan Black Flags to the Rescue.

A Story of the Fateful Struggle.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE LAND OF DEATH.

"Come, sister Lucita, we must get the overseer, Vance Mendoza, and his family to go with us, for it will be death to remain. We will ride up this path to their home. He has horses there."

"Come, or they are lost. They will obey you, where they would refuse me!"

These words from a youth of seventeen, were addressed to a girl several years his senior. Both were mounted—the youth in the dress and with the equipments of a Texan Ranger, the girl in a neat riding habit, but hatless.

They were on the sandy shore of the Cuban coast, where the waves of the gulf broke at their feet.

The night was dark, but starlight, and in the mouth of a lagoon near by a steamer was moored against the bank. Her decks were lit up with electric lights and a busy scene was in progress, for dead and wounded men were being carried on board in haste.

Upon the highlands rolling up from the coast was heard the sound of hot fighting, for men were struggling madly in a death struggle.

Back from the steamer the rattle of repeating rifles was heard, whence a band of men were holding at bay a party of Spanish cavalry.

It was a strange and thrilling scene there on that wild and picturesque coast, for the steamer had crept in under cover of the night and landed a party of Texan cowboys, who had come to rescue a comrade, his wife and sister, who had fallen under the ban of Spanish cruelty and devilry.

The rescue had been made, save that the wife of their comrade was up at the plantation villa, and thither had gone a band of rescuers.

The overseer of the plantation and his family the youth wished also to take from the island, for well enough he knew what fate might be visited upon them.

Urged by her brother, Lucita Agramonte had dashed along the coast with him, followed him up a steep trail to the plateau above, and, ten minutes after, the two had ridden up to the overseer's home.

All was silent there; but a light burned within, while, in the distance, where were the quarters of the plantation negroes, was heard the sound of wailing, as blacks were alarmed at the fierce fighting as the cowboys fought back the Spanish guard up at the villa, and held in check the cavalry down near the filibuster steamer.

"Ho, Mendoza! Come out! and fly with us; you, your wife and children!"

So shouted the youth as he and his sister halted before the house.

The door swung open quickly, and a man appeared, his wife and two children behind him.

"Ah, Senor Harry, it is you, and you too, Senorita Lucita?"

"So the brave cowboys of Texas rescued you, senorita, and the Senor Agramonte and his wife too?"

"This is no time, Mendoza, to ask questions or to answer them. You must go with us, for my brother and sister were rescued from the fortress, and the cowboys are now at the villa to take brother Rafael's wife from her imprisonment there."

"If you remain you will be butchered, you and your family."

"No, Senor Harry, I have kept to my home, and the Spaniards will spare us."

"No! no! They know no mercy!" cried Lucita.

"I must remain on the plantation, for here I have lived for years, and I must do what I can to save it, and the negroes."

"You will be killed and the place ruined! Hark! the fighting at the villa has ceased!"

"The cowboys are on their way to the steamer, and you must come."

"You have not a moment to lose, Vance Mendoza," anxiously urged the boy, while his sister added:

"You must go with us."

"No, no; we cannot! We must remain here, Senor Harry and Senorita Lucita. It is our duty. Go! or the steamer will leave without you, for hark! how fierce the fighting is there in the lagoon."

The boy listened an instant:

"It is true!" he cried. "I believe the steamer is backing out, for they think we are on board, Lucita! Will you come with us, Mendoza?"

"We cannot! But go! for the love of God go, or you will be too late!" almost shrieked the man.

"Come, Lucita!"

The boy spoke sternly and away dashed the two. They quickly reached the cliff, and there halted, for what they beheld filled them with dismay.

The steamer was already on her way out from the coast, and the Spanish cavalry ashore were firing upon her!

The Boy Bugler of the Cowboy Rescuers, and his beautiful sister had been left in the Land of Death.

CHAPTER II.

A STERN RESOLVE.

"My dear friend Chase, I cannot stand this suspense—this remaining in idleness and safety here in Texas, while those I love are in Cuba, in prison or suffering, I know not what. I must return to save them, if alive, or take the consequences be they what they may."

"Well said, my noble Rafael! for as your wife, a true daughter of Cuba, I too feel the terrible suspense hanging over us in not knowing what disaster has befallen your brave young brother and sister—they should be rescued, or at least the attempt made to rescue them."

The speakers were a man of thirty-five and a woman of twenty-two, whose dark faces, black eyes and hair denoted foreign birth, for they were Cubans.

The man was taller than the average of his race, broad-shouldered, well-formed, and strikingly good looking, while his dress of a Texan cowboy was most becoming to him.

The woman was rarely beautiful in face and form, and had in her dark face much to do and dare, did occasion demand it.

A third person was present, and to him had the Cuban first addressed himself. He was an American, handsome and daring-faced, well built, and with the manner of a dashing, courteous man of the world.

His dress was half Mexican, half plainsman.

The scene was a ranch in the cattle country of Texas, and on the borderland of civilization and wild life.

When the Cuban and his wife had both spoken, the American replied in a thoughtful way:

"I appreciate your wish, Rafael, and your suspense for your brother and sister's fate."

"I too feel the same, for you well know how dear your sister Lucita is to me, and when you returned to Cuba to marry and live there, leaving your young brother Harry to my guardianship, the brave lad became as dear to me as though bound by brotherly ties."

"When he received the letter from Mendoza, the overseer of your plantation, that you had been captured and were a prisoner with your sister in the Spanish fortress near your home, and your wife was held captive in the villa, how gladly did I call upon the Cowboy Clan of which I am chief, to go to Cuba and rescue you, their former captain, from certain death, and my main ally was your brother, Hotspur Harry, our Boy Bugler."

"You know the result but too well, our landing upon the Cuban coast by night, our dash to the Mountain Fortress, and rescue of yourself and Lucita, and of your wife here from the villa where she also was a prisoner, while, when we escaped to sea we discovered that neither Hotspur Harry nor Lucita were on board the steamer."

"They had mysteriously disappeared."

"What their fate is none of us here know."

"But Rafael Agramonte, it is for me, not you, to return to Cuba and seek their rescue."

"Though a Cuban born, you are an American citizen; as a Boy Patriot you came here with your father and mother after the ten years' war."

"The general, your father, marrying here, his two children by his Texan wife, both Harry and Lucita, are also Americans, now in the hands of Spaniards."

"Now that your home in Cuba is in ruins all your interests are here, so here remain with your wife, while I will return to the island and seek the rescue of Harry and Lucita, or to avenge them if they are dead or have been harmed."

"My Cowboy Clan will gladly follow me, and I can charter the same steamer, the Mustang, to put me upon the coast of Cuba as before."

"Taos, the Cuban coast pilot, as you know, is on my ranch, and he can guide us, while my cowboys are more than anxious to return and rescue the Boy Bugler and his beautiful sister."

"I am alone in the world, you are not."

"You can care for my ranch, and I will at once begin arrangements to sail for Cuba with my cowboy rescuers, and you and your wife, mark my words, we will rescue them, or bitterly avenge them."

"Captain Charlie Chase, you are true as steel, and a noble man; but I am a Cuban, and Rafael is a Cuban, and we go with you."

"Our ranches here can be cared for by managers, and it is Rafael's duty to rescue his loved Cuba, as it is mine."

"He was a patriot as a boy in the ten years' war—should he be less as a man?"

"Women suffered in the last war, and they are suffering in this."

"But both Gomez and Maceo have Amazon guards in their commands, brave Cuban women who are fighting for Cuba, and hence I go with my husband, and we follow you and your Cowboy Rangers even unto death to rescue both Harry and Lucita and to strike a blow for Cuba Libre," and the face of the

Cuban wife lightened up with stern resolve, while her husband cried:

"You have decided, Stella, my wife! We go together to the rescue of those so dear to us!"

CHAPTER III.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

It was a dashing, daring band, the Cowboy Clan of Texas, and when they took the war trail evildoers and redskins went into hiding at once.

It was in the ranch country of Texas they dwelt, and in the discharge of their duty they were, as cowboys, scattered far and wide through the cattle country.

But, bound by ties as strong as death, holding regular meetings in a secret retreat to keep their order together, they were ever ready to rally at the call of their leader, Captain Charlie Chase, whenever he sent their Boy Bugler out to ring them up by the stirring notes of his bugle, as he sped from ranch to ranch.

But their last rally at the bugle call had been to rescue their former chief, Rafael Agramonte, who had returned to Cuba to live after marrying a Cuban girl, and his sister had accompanied him, leaving Hotspur Harry, as the Boy Bugler was known, under the guardianship of the wealthy young rancher, Charlie Chase, who had become the cowboys' captain.

The rally had been made, the run to Cuba followed, then a landing, the rescue and escape, but, alas! the Cowboy Clan had left their Boy Bugler behind, and his sister, too, had disappeared.

Loudly had the Cowboy Rescuers demanded to be relanded upon the coast to tear the captives from Spanish hands.

But prudence prevailed, the steamer Mustang returned to the shores of Texas, and the cowboys dispersed to their respective ranches, few knowing of the successful expedition.

But the Boy Bugler was missed from his accustomed haunts, and the cowboys were hoping that another expedition would set sail to rescue him and his sister, as had been his brother Rafael and his wife rescued.

"It will come some day," had been the words of the cowboys in dispersing.

"No news from Hotspur Harry?" had been the first question asked between the brave Texans when they met.

So matters stood when Captain Charlie Chase, with the Cuban patriot and his wife, are presented to the reader, and the fair daughter of the Gem of the Antilles had uttered her stern resolve to become an Amazon avenger for her struggling land.

In response to her brave words, Charlie Chase had grasped her hand and said:

"With such daughters, what should not the sons of Cuba be?"

"I will call the Cowboy Clan together, tell them the duty before us, telegraph to Captain Telfair of the steamer Mustang to return to the same rendezvous on the coast of Texas, and we will have as many brave men as I can muster to be there to meet the vessel and sail for Cuba."

"But the greatest secrecy must be observed, for we are here in Texas Americans, and the laws of our land must be respected in our striking a blow for Cuba Libre."

"By all means, Captain Charlie, and our first duty is to keep a lookout for Spanish spies and traitors."

"Very true, Rafael."

"Have you heard anything from Don Ruiz Valdés, whom you found out to be

a Spaniard, and not a Mexican, and who sought to betray you in your last expedition?"

"I am told that he is again upon his ranch, though pretending to have gone away."

"The wound he received in my last meeting with him has not fully healed. Dan Dallas tells me, and he is in hiding until he fully recovers, while he has been secretly trying to buy members of our clan to turn traitor and sell us out, for he confidently believes that there are cowboy filibustering expeditions to go from Texas to Cuba, and he is revengeful, you know."

"Ah, yes; especially as my sister, Lucita, refused him, and he regards you as his successful rival."

"He prefers to destroy you rather than aid Spain, Charlie."

"Very true, and as you did not like him as a lover for Lucita, he is revengeful toward you."

"You may be sure that, though he is keeping quiet, really in hiding at his ranch, he is planning mischief of some kind, and is watching us through spies his money will buy, for Don Ruiz Valdés is not a man to forget or forgive, if he thinks he has been wronged."

"Then put spies upon him and his spies, Charlie, and call upon me for all money, for you know I have gold hidden away."

"Yes, and I have a fortune in jewels to give to the cause of Cuba," added Stella Agramonte, earnestly.

"You both would give life and fortune in the cause, I well know."

"But I will at once set a watch upon Don Ruiz Valdés, and bring him up very suddenly if I find he is plotting against us, while I will also call the Clan of Cowboys together and swear in the men who are to be the rescuers," and after a few more words together Captain Charlie Chase remounted his horse and rode away from the Agramonte Ranch.

"That man will rescue Lucita and Harry or die in the attempt," said the Cuban to his wife as they watched the departure of the cowboys' captain.

"He will win," was the answer.

CHAPTER IV.

A TRAITOR TO THE CLAN.

Don Ruiz Valdés was a man of importance in the Texas cattle country where his ranch was located.

Though his home was a log cabin without, it was palatial within, for the Don was gifted with most luxurious habits.

His cattle were numbered by the thousand, his sheep as well, and hundreds of horses ranged his lands.

The Don was supposed to be a Mexican, who, for reasons he kept to himself had come across the Rio Grande to make his home in Texas.

What he really was Captain Charlie Chase of the Cowboy Clan had discovered—a Spaniard.

He belonged to the Secret League of Cowboys

Though all knew that he longed to be their captain, and was not therefore fond of Captain Chase, who was their leader, while being also his rival he hated him for having won the love of Lucita Agramonte.

But the Don had been regarded as an honorable man by his cowboy comrades until circumstances betrayed him as treacherous, and wounded in a hostile meeting with Captain Chase. He had afterward been regarded as a traitor to the clan, and such a charge was most serious with those men.

Seated in his cabin home, when presented to the reader, his face was grave and stern, and his eyes had a malignant glitter in them.

If he was still suffering from his wound he did not reveal the fact.

At length, with an impatient oath, he said: "Curse the fellow; why does he not come?"

Hardly had he uttered the words before there came a rap at the window and a voice said in Spanish:

"Don't open the door, señor, or the light will be seen."

"Raise a window in one of the rooms without a light, and I will come in."

The Don arose, entered another room, and, raising a window, a man sprang in.

When he entered the sitting room he was seen to be a Mexican, but in Texas cowboy dress.

"Well, why all this secrecy, Andrea?" said the Don, who certainly, barring his angry face, was a very handsome man, just such a one to catch a woman's eye.

"I thought the señor did not wish to be known to be at home."

"Neither do I, save to my servants and you."

"Your home is watched, señor, and if the door was opened it would show that it was not dark, but held an occupant."

"Ah! I am under watch, then?"

"Yes, señor, and have been since Captain Chase returned from Cuba."

"Did they really go, he and his cowboys?"

"They did."

"I have had no letters from Havana to that effect, though I do know that fully a hundred of the cowboys were missing for two weeks or more."

"They went to Cuba, sir."

"Landed?"

"Yes, señor."

"With what success?"

"They rescued the Señor Rafael Agramonte and his wife."

"And his sister?"

"She did not return with them."

"Ha! can this be true?"

"They are back upon the Agramonte Ranch, but the young lady is not, nor is the boy, Hotspur Harry."

"Curse the boy!"

"But it was the boy, señor, that got Captain Chase to take the cowboys on that expedition."

"I can hardly believe it."

"They went, señor, for I know that the boy went to Key West and was landed in Cuba in some way, to prepare for the coming of the cowboys, and arrange signals for their vessel to run in by."

"There was a steamer landed on the Texas coast, the cowboys embarked, landed in Cuba, rescued Agramonte and his wife, and disembarked the clan again."

"But the Señorita Lucita and her young brother did not return with them."

"I find it hard to believe it."

"Still it is true, and more, señor, as they claim you are a traitor to the clan from what they have found out about you, and really believe you to be a spy of Spain to prevent filibustering from Texas, they intend to arrest you and try you by the law that governs the Cowboy Clan."

"Caramba! that means death!"

"It does, señor."

"And you say my ranch is watched?"

"It has been for two days, señor."

"Why did you not come and inform me before?"

"Are you a traitor to me?"

"Oh, no, señor."

"I am true to you, and to my own interests."

"It will be to your advantage to be."

"I know that well, señor."

"But I was unable to get here sooner, for the ranch was so well guarded."

"You will be arrested if you do not escape, and you know what a trial means."

"But too well."

"Yet how to escape is the question."

"I will arrange it, for I will find some way, never fear, for you must be at large, must seek safety in the town, as there is work for you to do, and quickly."

"What is it, Andrea?"

"Another cowboy expedition is going to Cuba from Texas!"

"Impossible!"

"It is true."

"For what purpose?"

"To rescue the Senorita Lucita and the Boy Bugler, for in the excitement that followed the last landing the steamer sailed without them."

"And Lucita Agramonte is in Cuba?"

"Yes, señor."

"And the Boy Bugler?"

"Yes, señor."

"Andrea, I must escape, and, more, I must go to Cuba."

"But how do you know this?"

"I know it as a member of the Cowboy Clan, señor, for I attended the meeting called by Captain Chase two nights ago at the secret retreat of our League, but, as I said, I could not before warn you, señor."

CHAPTER V.

A PAIR OF VILLAINS.

Don Ruiz Valdós seemed as nearly startled as a man of his nerve allowed himself to become at what the Mexican cowboy had told him.

Andrea was not one of the cattlemen upon the Don's ranch, for he was more useful to him elsewhere.

In fact, it was not a secret that the Mexican and the Don were not to all outward appearances friends.

Andrea claimed to have a cause of bitter complaint against the Don, and no one of the clan had suspected that it was a part of a plot for one to be more useful to the other.

Still, it would not have done for the Mexican cowboy to be seen visiting the ranch of Don Ruiz after the secret meeting of the clan, for Captain Chase had called the band together after leaving Rafael Agramonte and his wife.

What had been decided at that meeting the Mexican knew, for no spies or traitors were supposed to be in the band.

After pacing to and fro for a minute or more Don Ruiz turned to the Mexican and said:

"Tell me just what was said and done at that meeting."

Andrea obeyed, telling of the plan of Captain Chase to again go to Cuba with his Cowboy Clan on a rescue expedition.

"And the start will soon be made?"

"Within a week, señor."

"How many will go?"

"Perhaps volunteers out of the band, yet cowboys, will be taken, making a force all told of a hundred and fifty."

"Horses and all?"

"Yes, señor, and the very best of arms, and plenty of them."

"Where will they start from?"

"That secret has not been told, señor."

"The men will leave on the day before the night of sailing."

"And the vessel?"

"Has already been secured, señor."

"It is the same as on the last round-up in Cuba of the Clan of Cowboys."

"This expedition must be headed off, Andrea."

"As you say, señor."

"You were not on the last one?"

"No, señor, I was ill, you remember."

"Yes, and I needed you then, too."

"I am sorry, señor."

"Now I think of it, Andrea, the expedition must be allowed to go."

"Yes, señor."

"And wiped out when they get there."

"If you knew where to find them, señor."

"They will again land near the Agramonte estate, known as the Wild Flower Plantation, and which Rafael Agramonte got by his marriage with Stella Aquilar."

"Yes, señor."

"There is where the expedition must be captured, and that will mean that every member of it must suffer under the garrote."

"You know, señor Don."

"But I must get away from here, go to Havana, get a command given me by the Captain General, and be on hand to meet these Texan Cowboys, whom their daring leader intends to land upon Cuban soil."

"You will surprise them, señor."

"Yes, and the Senorita Lucita Agramonte is there, and that means—"

But the Don stopped short.

He had apparently been thinking aloud.

"And her brother, the Boy Bugler, is there, señor," ventured Andrea.

"Yes, and with him a prisoner I can force—"

But the Don again paused.

He felt that he was saying too much, even to the Mexican, his hireling.

Suddenly he said:

"See here, Andrea, I must leave here at the earliest possible moment."

"It is necessary, señor, if you love life."

"Then I leave all to you."

"I will do all I can, señor."

"What will you do?"

"I will go and arrange for your flight to the town."

"When?"

"To-morrow night."

"Not sooner?"

"Impossible, señor."

"And then?"

"I will be here to guide you to safety."

"Good!"

"I must catch the train to New Orleans, where I take the steamer to Havana."

"Yes, señor."

"And will you accompany me?"

"I go with the expedition, señor; but please remember, in the wiping out of the clan, that I am your friend."

"My servant you mean, for no man is my friend."

"I will remember, however, and reward you well."

"Thanks, señor."

"I am a poor man."

"That has ever been your song, Andrea."

"But I will give you other work to do once we reach Cuba."

"I thank you, señor."

"I will arrange with you to betray, if I can, the cowboys into your hands, for, señor, I hate all Americanos with undying hate."

"I can never forgive them," and the Mexican spoke with savage earnestness.

"As I also hate them—the men, Andrea."

"But now to arrange our plans for the future," and for a long while the two

men were busy with their plot to entrain the Cowboy Clan to their death, once they landed upon Cuban soil.

This plot settled, the Mexican slipped quietly away as he had come.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DON.

Left alone Don Ruiz paced the floor with a slow and thoughtful step.

He was planning mischief, and to strike a blow that would be felt.

Like many Spaniards, he hated Americans, and when he had made his home in Texas it was simply for his own interests, not because he cared for the country or the people he dwelt among.

As a ranchero of means, he had joined the band of Scout Vigilantes that were known as the Cowboy Clan.

It was for the protection of all against Indians, Mexican raiders, and outlaws in general.

In this league all were equal, and they were bound together by the strongest ties.

Just who they were no one, not a member, knew, though they might suspect.

Of course, when so many men were banded together, there must be naturally some treachery.

There were tares among the wheat, and Captain Chase had made this discovery.

The ironbound laws of the clan were as binding as death, and the man that broke them took his life in his hands.

Two men had proven traitors, and their penalty was to die.

Through them the Don had been discovered to be a spy upon his own comrades, and he was known to be watching the Texans to see that they allowed no breaking of the neutrality laws against Spain, for when the insurgent struggle again broke out in Cuba rumors were rife that Texas would lend the aid of many of her bold sons of the saddle to join hand in hand with the patriots.

But the Don had overreached himself, attacked his chief, and received a wound that, though not severe, had given him the chance to remain in hiding to plot against the clan.

The lover of Lucita Agramonte before she had gone to Cuba with her brother after his marriage, he had hated both Rafael and Hotspur Harry because they liked his rival, Charlie Chase.

In fact, the Don was a good all-around hater of every one save a pretty girl and himself.

But known to be a spy of Spain, he had gotten himself into trouble, for his treachery to his comrades would soon bring him punishment, unless he acted promptly and well.

Thus matters stood when he was skulking in his own house, and had the Mexican Andrea for his spy and hireling.

His servants, a negro man and his wife, had their cabin some distance off, so the Don dwelt alone in his house.

The servants had their orders to say that the Don was away, and the cabin had the appearance of being deserted.

But he was there as has been seen, and Andrea knew where to find him.

"I must act promptly, get away from here, go to Cuba, and I can make good terms with the Captain General, and thus obtain the power I wish there."

"So Lucita is there, is she, and that wild young fellow, the Boy Bugler, also?"

"I am in luck."

"And Captain Charlie Chase is going with his clan, while Rafael Agramonte will accompany him."

"This is my chance to strike them all

with one blow, and then the fair Lucita will find in Don Ruiz her best friend.

"But I must live two lives, her friend and their foe.

"If they could catch me now the cowboys would quickly end my life, so why not end theirs?"

"I will, and do a good turn for Spain as well."

Having seen what chances were before him, the Don made his arrangements for his departure, packing up the few things he could take with him, and putting them in a large pair of saddle bags.

He brought out of a hiding place in the chimney of his cabin a belt full of gold and bank notes and a small bag that contained a number of fine diamonds.

The Don did not intend to go broke into Cuba evidently.

His finances attended to, the Don turned in for the night and was soon asleep.

The servants appeared in the morning, bringing a waiter upon which was his breakfast, for no fire was built in the cabin kitchen, as the place was closed up.

The Don arose, ate his breakfast, and felt that he had an anxious day before him until Andrea should come for him that night.

He was right to feel anxious, for not long after his breakfast he saw three horsemen approaching.

"One of them is the chief, yes, and Rafael Agramonte is another—Caramba! The third is Andrea, the Mexican.

"My God! What does it mean?" and the face of Don Ruiz became livid.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DON'S VISITORS.

Had Captain Chase and Rafael Agramonte come alone to the Don's ranch, the latter would not have been surprised.

But to see with them none other than his faithful spy, he, being treacherous himself, at once felt that Andrea had played him false.

But the Don was as tricky as a fox, and at once sprung into his bed and played 'possum.

He would pretend to still be suffering from his wound.

The look of pain upon his face was well assumed, and when he heard voices without he was prepared to receive his visitors.

If Andrea was false he would claim that his wound had taken a sudden and unfavorable turn in the night, and, as he still had his side bandaged, he could thus deceive his visitors, even to the Mexican, for, though not serious, he had still been quite severely wounded.

His servants he was sure he could trust, and he felt relieved when he heard them tell Captain Chase that their master was suffering with his wound and would see no one, in fact, they had orders to say he was not at home.

"He will see us," the captain of the cowboys had replied, and he knocked at the door.

The Don felt cheered, for had Andrea turned traitor they would have bolted right in.

"Come in," he said in a faint voice, and the look of agony upon his face was enough to touch the hardest heart.

In came the visitors, Andrea waiting at the door.

There was not the brightest light in the Don's room, and at first the visitors, coming out of the light, could not see distinctly, but they heard the faintly uttered words:

"This is an unlooked for honor, Captain Chase, after our last meeting."

"It is a call I deemed necessary, Don Ruiz, under existing circumstances; but I did not expect to find you in bed."

"Have you so soon forgotten the wound you gave me?"

"No more than I have that it was in return for your treacherous shot at me.

"I, however, supposed, as you were able to leave the cabin of Don Dallas, where you were taken, and come home, that the wound was but slight."

"It was my leaving that opened the wound afresh.

"I have been a great sufferer, but am improving."

"I am sorry to see any one suffer, especially by my hand; but you recognize the gentleman with me, I suppose?"

"Why, it is Senor Rafael Agramonte—I am glad to see him, but I supposed you were in Cuba."

"No, I have returned to Texas with my wife, and regret to learn that Don Ruiz Valdés, one of the Cowboy Clan I was so long chief of, has proved a traitor to the cause," said Agramonte quietly.

"I have been accused of that of which I am not guilty.

"When I am able to get out I will prove my truth."

"Senor Don, I regret to find you thus, for I came to announce that at the league meeting last held it was decided to take you before a jury of your comrades and try you upon the charge of treachery, as the worst of the crimes of which you are deemed guilty, for your attack upon me I did not bring up against you.

"It was further decided that you should be arrested and held a prisoner in the Retreat until you could be tried, and I came here to-day to make you a prisoner."

"Caramba!" growled the Don.

"Under the circumstances of your being still confined to your bed, I cannot send you under guard to the Retreat, as was my intention.

"I am unable to stand the ride, senor captain; but I am willing to stand trial when asked to do so."

"It will be well to consider that it will be a trial where your life hangs by a thread."

"I have no fear, and will report at the Retreat when able to ride there, giving you my parole of honor to do so."

"Senor Don, I will not take your word, for I know well it is worthless."

"You insult a man when he is down, Captain Chase."

"Oh, no, I do not wish to fret, or excite you now, but I must do my duty, and not being able to trust you, I must leave you under guard, make a prisoner of you in fact, and I will therefore leave Cowboy Andrea, the Mexican, here to watch over you until you are able to ride to our Mountain Retreat, and then take you there.

"But let me tell you that he shall have orders to kill you at the first attempt at escape on your part."

The look of suffering on the Don's face increased tenfold; but it was to hide his joy at knowing that Andrea, the Mexican, was to be his guard.

The Mexican was accordingly called into the room, given his orders, and Captain Chase and Rafael Agramonte left the ranch, feeling that the Don was beyond the power to do them harm in their intended invasion of Cuba.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR THE CAUSE OF "CUBA LIBRE."

"His wound was worse than I had believed," said Captain Chase, as he rode

away from the Don's ranch with Rafael Agramonte.

"He appeared to have suffered much; but then he is a sly coyote, and as cunning as a fox."

"I know that; but then I dared not send him to the Retreat, in case his wound might prove fatal."

"True.

"But are you sure of that Mexican, for to me he has villain branded upon his whole face.

"He was not a member of the clan when I organized it."

"No, he joined after you left; but he is an American citizen, he claims, owns a small ranch over on the river, and hates Don Ruiz as he does a rattlesnake, though why, no one seems to know; but the Spaniard has wronged, or offended him in some way only the two of them know how."

"If hate governs the Mexican, then, Don Ruiz is safe, for that fellow will find that there is no escape for him."

"Yes, Rafael, and knowing how the Mexican felt toward him was why I selected him as guard, when I met him this morning; but you know I have had a couple of the men watching the Don since he returned home."

"Yes, and it was a good idea; but you told me this morning, Charlie, that you had heard from your ward?"

"Yes, I had word from Captain Telfair that he was just about to leave New Orleans for Mobile to get a cargo, when he heard from me, and at once cancelled his contract and sent his steamer on the ways to be cleaned and put in proper condition for our expedition, for you know it don't do to make any mistake in running the Spanish blockade."

"No, indeed, for it was the foul condition of the Virginus that caused her capture, as, had she been in good order, she could have doubled the speed of the Tornado, her capturer.

"It was the sending out of hard coal, instead of soft, which lost the Hornet, and the bad condition of the Commandatario which caused her capture.

"Oh, no, life hangs on the speed and condition of a vessel in dealing with merciless Spain, and the captain of the Mustang is wise, indeed."

"Yes, better the delay of a few days than capture by neglect, for we have in this war already lost the steamer Hawkins, you know."

"Yes, only if it came to close quarters with the Mustang, and our Cowboy Clan aboard, woe be unto the Spanish captain and crew that would run his cruiser alongside to capture us."

"Yes, indeed, for our Cowboy Filibusters would be worse than old time pirates in boarding a Spaniard."

As the coming of the Mustang to the rendezvous appointed on the coast of Texas, as soon as she could be gotten into perfect condition, was an assured thing, Captain Chase had determined to only allow the picked men for the expedition to know of the selected spot of embarkation just in time to reach there, so that no traitor who might appear among them would be able to foil him in departing.

Each man had been told to bring his best horse and equipments, and every fifth man was to bring an extra pony, in case of loss and accident.

All were to have a couple of repeating rifles, two belts, and one holster, revolvers, a machete, lasso, canteen, haversack for provisions, roll of blankets, and plenty of ammunition for all arms.

No other weapons or stores were to be taken for the Cubans, for it was to be merely an invasion of rescue, to get the

Boy Bugler and Lucita out of the hands of the Spaniards.

If Rafael Agramonte and others wished to remain to join the patriots they could do so, but the mission of the cowboys was that wholly of rescuers.

Continuing on their trail toward the Agramonte ranch, Captain Chase continued:

"I suppose your wife cannot be changed from her purpose to accompany us?"

"No, indeed, for she is heart and soul in her determination to go, and, if I remain, become an amazon soldier."

"Of course, Harry and Lucita being born in Texas, their mother a Texan, as you know, I hope they will return with you; but my duty, Charlie, is plain, for my father, as you know, was a Cuban patriot; as a boy I was with him, and when the Ten Years' War ended, only then did he fly to Texas and become an American."

"He found a grave in Texas, and I, as a Cuban by birth, an American by adoption, may find a grave in my native land, for I owe it to my race, my island home, to fight for the cause of Cuba Libre, and Stella will live or die with me I know, fighting, as many another fearless daughter of our land has for Cuba Libre, this just cause we have against Spain."

"Should we lose our lives there, to your care I leave my half brother and sister, Charlie."

"And I accept the trust, Rafael; but Heaven spare you, my noble friend, for many years to come," was the cowboy captain's reply.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MEXICAN'S STRANGE SACRIFICE.

Don Ruiz was silent for a long while after the departure of Captain Chase and Rafael Agramonte.

He seemed to be waiting for the Mexican to speak.

The Mexican was, however, waiting for Don Ruiz to address him.

Andrea had received his orders, and his face had a look upon it as though he intended to carry them out.

At last the Don said, as he saw that the Mexican did not intend to speak:

"Well, Andrea, I am in luck."

"In what way, señor?"

"In having you for my guard."

"Captain Chase did not seem to think so, señor."

"Why not?"

"He told me to guard you well, to kill you if you attempted to escape, and if you were found secure when your time of trial came I should have one thousand dollars paid me out of the cowboy's treasury."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir."

"He does not appear to regard me as highly as I supposed."

"That is what he said, señor."

"When did you meet him?"

"I met him on the trail, sir, between his home and Señor Agramonte's."

"I was going to see what I could find out that could be of use to you, señor."

"Well, what did you discover?"

"Nothing, señor; for he made me come with him to your ranch to guard you."

"It was a surprise when I saw you with those two."

"You suspected me, señor?"

"Oh, no, Andrea: I know you are true to me, and it will be greatly to your interest to be so."

"But, señor, I am placed to watch you, and if you escape I will be shot."

"No!"

"It is true, señor."

"Does that mean that you do not intend to let me escape?"

"My life is dear to me, señor."

"I see."

"Well, I can pay you the one thousand dollars the captain offered."

"It cannot be, señor."

The Don looked positively startled.

Did the Mexican really intend to guard him for fear of losing his own life?

"See here, Andrea, I do not intend to stand any trial for that means death to me."

"And death to me if I allow you to escape, señor."

"We must come to terms, señor."

The Mexican shook his head.

"I must escape at once, make my way to New Orleans, and sail for Havana."

"It would be all right, señor, if death would not fall upon me."

"I can arrange it."

"How, señor?"

"Captain Chase believed I was really suffering with my wound."

"Yes, señor."

"He did not suppose I would be able to ride to the retreat for a couple of weeks."

"No, señor."

"If, therefore, you were to return to him and say I sprung upon you when you believed me helpless, bound you, and escaped, he would not blame you."

"Oh, yes, señor."

"I do not see how."

"He knows my strength and pluck, señor."

"Ah!"

"He would not believe I could master you?"

"No, señor."

The Don became lost in thought.

He was plotting further mischief.

At last he said with a smile:

"I have it, Andrea."

"Yes, señor."

"Are you afraid of suffering?"

"How do you mean?"

"Of physical suffering?"

"I have suffered much, señor, in my time."

"Then you know what it is?"

"Yes, señor."

"My plan is to strike you a blow on the head that will cut to the skull, but do little harm."

"Yes, señor."

"I can also send a bullet through the fleshy part of your arm."

"What for, señor?"

"So you can go to Captain Chase after a couple of days and tell him that I shot you when you were not expecting trouble and it benumbed your arm so as to make it useless for the time being and I sprung out of my bed and dealt you a blow that rendered you insensible."

"When you came to you lay upon the floor of my room, bound with a lariat hand and foot and also gagged."

"Also you can tell him you were thus found by my servants when they brought my supper; but I had mounted my best horse and had half a day's start, and at night you could not find my trail."

"How will that do, Andrea?"

"What is it worth to you, señor?"

"Call it a couple of thousand."

"And the one added that Captain Chase promised me?"

"Well, yes; but you are grasping."

"Not when it is your life one way, mine the other, señor."

"I'll pay it and arrange for my going."

"Better put it off until to-morrow, señor."

"Why?"

"It will look too sudden the other way."

"Very well."

"And you will go to Cuba?"

"Yes."

"If I come with the cowboys you are to protect me?"

"Yes, but you had better desert after your arrival, and then I will know all about the force, and there will be no danger to you."

"I will señor."

"But about that blow and shot I am to receive?"

"Well?"

"Suppose you cut an artery?"

"Bah! I know where to hit you."

"All right, señor, I will make the sacrifice, but I am taking mighty big chances for little money."

"I will remember all, good Andrea, once we meet in Cuba."

CHAPTER X.

UNDER COVER OF THE NIGHT.

It was just the night for a secret expedition.

It was dark, threatening, and a chill wind was blowing, a regular Texas norther.

As the wind came from off shore, a steamer had come close in under the lee of the land, to take on board a very strange freight, in that she was to load under cover of the darkness.

There were horses grouped upon the shore, piles of saddles and bridles, rifles in great numbers, belts of arms, rolls of blankets, and camp equipage.

Built out hastily from the shore was a small wharf, and against this lay a flat-bottomed boat with bright sides capable of carrying a dozen horses closely packed together.

There were two of the steamer's boats there also, and while the horses were being packed into the large flat, used as a ferry, the saddles and other things were being carried out in the yawls.

The ponies were driven into the ferry, two men stood at each sweep, and the work of embarkation was begun.

In swing stalls the horses were hoisted on board rapidly by derricks, the small boats deposited their loads, and in a few hours' time the crew, horses, and all had been transferred from the shore to the steamer.

Little was left to be done, save to take away the temporary wharf and destroy all signs of the embarkation of the secret expedition.

Standing upon the shore, waiting to go off in the last boat and watching the men destroy the little wharf were what appeared to be three men, muffled up in great coats.

But one was a woman.

It was Stella Agramonte, the beautiful and daring Cuban wife of the patriot, Rafael Agramonte, who stood by her side.

The third of the group was Captain Chase, "Captain Charlie," as his devoted Cowboy Clan loved to speak of him.

Turning to Senora Agramonte Captain Chase said:

"We are nearly ready to go aboard now, but several of the men return, you know, senora, and I wish to give you a last chance to go with them back to the ranch, for this is no expedition for you, I must candidly tell you."

"Do you mean that I should back down, now that the moment of danger has come, señor?" asked Stella.

"I mean that you should return to your ranch, leaving Rafael and myself to go on the expedition."

"Do you not think so, Rafael?"

"I would prefer Stella not to go, for no one can tell what is before us," answered Rafael.

"I appreciate your kindness, Senor Charlie; but I feel that I must go.

"I will do what other Cuban women have done, go with my husband in the struggle.

"No, where he goes I go, and whatever be his fate I am willing to share it.

"I know how I feel, but there is no backdown in a Cuban woman who loves her country as I do."

Captain Charlie said no more.

He knew that the mind of the brave young wife was made up, go she would, be her fate what it might.

He had written Captain Telfair of the Mustang to make arrangements for her coming, but he had hoped that at the last moment when the few men returned from seeing the expedition depart, she would be influenced to change her mind and go back to the ranch.

But he saw his mistake, and Stella was to go.

"All ready, sir," said one of the men, and before reply could be made the sound of rapidly approaching hoofs was heard.

At once all was excitement.

Had United States officers learned of the going to Cuba of the Cowboy Clan, and were they coming to stop the expedition?

They were too late, if so, for the men, horses, and equipment were all on board, and there was the boat to bear off to the steamer the two leaders, Stella, and half a dozen men engaged in the last work on shore.

The few cowboys who were not to go were at once ordered to mount their horses and scatter, not await the result.

The rest of the party hastily entered the boat and hauled off shore a short distance.

The hoof-falls grew louder and louder, and were made out to be coming along the shore trail directly to the spot where the embarkation had taken place.

Nearer and nearer came the echoing hoofs, until it was known that there was only one horse.

But one United States officer might be dangerous, if he was resisted, and the boat was ordered still further away from the shore, while the horsemen that had scattered hid in the chapparel to see who the rapid rider might be.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LONE RIDER.

"It will not do to resist a Government officer, Rafael, so we can only hear what he has to say, if it is a United States Marshal, and make no reply, pulling out to our boat," said Captain Chase.

"Yes, that is all.

"But may he not be one of your men?" asked Rafael Agramonte.

"I do not know who.

"Not one besides those here knew where to find me, and I called the roll and every man is present, just one hundred and fifty, counting you and I—"

"And one woman makes one hundred and fifty-one under your command, Captain Charlie," said Stella.

"Yes you are to be my aid-de-camp," was the answer of the captain, and just then the lone horseman darted up to the shore.

He looked about him an instant, seemingly fixed his eyes first upon the steamer lying a couple of hundred yards off shore, and then, as he beheld the yawl close in, he hailed:

"Ho, that boat!"

"Ay, ay," responded Captain Charlie, with the professional tone he had learned when an officer of the United States Navy.

"What boat is that?" asked the voice.

"A yawl belonging to the steamer lying off shore."

"What steamer is that?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"I am on an important service and wish to make no mistake."

"Who are you, and what is your business with us?"

"I bear the name of Andrea the Mexican, and am a cowboy."

"Ho, Andrea, is that you?" quickly asked the commander.

"Yes, Senor Captain, for I take it that you are Captain Chase."

"I am."

"Give way, men!" and the yawl returned to the shore.

"What brings you here, Andrea?" asked Captain Chase as he leaped ashore.

"Senor, I have bad news for you."

"What is it?"

"My prisoner escaped from me."

"Ah! This is bad; but he can do us no harm now."

"How was it, Andrea?"

"Why, senor, when you and Senor Rafael were there he was playing a cunning game, for he was not badly wounded as he pretended to be."

"He was all right, but still played possum on me until he got a chance to act, which was two nights ago."

"You are hurt, I see, as your arm is in a sling."

"Yes, Senor Captain, he shot to kill, at a moment when I had an idea he was half dead."

"His revolver he had hidden in his bed, and he bided his time."

"But, though he shot to kill, his aim was not true, and the bullet passed through my right arm."

"It is but a flesh wound, but the shock benumbed me for a moment, and before I could resist he laid my head open with a blow—see the cut here—and I fell stunned."

"When I returned to consciousness I found myself bound hands and feet, and I was gagged as well."

"And he was gone?"

"Yes, senor."

"I cannot blame you, Andrea, for he deceived Senor Rafael and myself as well."

"But he is a very dangerous man to be at large, holding the secrets he does."

"I wish I could have done something to recapture him, Senor Captain; but I was not relieved of my bonds and gag until found by the negro servants the next morning, and he had been gone a dozen hours then."

"Too bad."

"He had taken his most needed things on a pack horse, and that seemed to indicate that he was going well away."

"I was so badly used up that I could not ride until the next day, and then I went to Doctor Tyler, to find him gone."

"Yes, he is our surgeon on this expedition, and which you knew of."

"I had forgotten that you knew our rendezvous on the coast."

"Yes, senor, and I wish to go with you."

"How about your wounds?"

"Doctor Tyler will soon have them all right, senor, and I have had too many hard knocks to mind a wound so long as it is not serious."

"All right, Andrea, it is about the best we can do for you."

"I will call back the men who skipped off at your coming, and let them take your horse."

"Oh! Thank you, Senor Captain!" said the treacherous Mexican warmly.

The mounted men were called from the chapparel by a loud whistle, and

were given the Mexican's horse to take back with them.

Then good-byes were said to the party on shore, the boat was rowed out to the steamer, and half an hour after the fleet craft was ploughing the dark and rough waters of the Gulf on her way to land the Cowboy Filibusters in Cuba to rescue Senorita Agramonte, and the Boy Bugler of the Secret Clan, in whose midst was Andrea, the traitor.

CHAPTER XII.

A TERRIBLE ORDEAL.

It will now be well, while the steamer Mustang is on her way to Cuba, to land the Cowboy Filibusters upon the island in their good cause of rescue, to return to the two who had been left in the confusion of the retreat to the tender mercies of the Spaniards.

Again it was through the intention of the Boy Bugler of the Cowboy Clan to save the overseer of his brother's plantation from Spanish fury that will follow the landing of the expedition, that had gotten his sister and himself into trouble.

The youth had believed that Lucita's going with him would induce Mendoza and his family to at once fly with them.

But he was mistaken, as has been seen, for the overseer of the Wild Flower Plantation had his all at stake, and if he went from his home he felt that he would be as a beggar in a strange land.

Thus had he refused to go, and it was with a feeling of relief that he saw Hotspur Harry and Lucita turn and dash away.

"They are safe, now, wife, and all will be well."

"But what a splendid rescue those Texans have made."

"If Cuba only had more of such daring and desperate fighters they would soon drive the Spaniards into the sea—Great God! they have missed the steamer!"

The cry rung out in a tone of horror and anguish as the overseer saw the brother and sister dashing back to his home.

"They have missed the steamer—see there!" and the overseer's wife pointed out upon the Gulf to where the Mustang was just visible, going seaward, having backed out beyond the shelter of the overhanging cliffs.

Just then up dashed Hotspur Harry and his sister.

The brave youth tried to be cheerful, but his voice had a quiver in it as he said:

"They have left us, Senor Mendoza."

"They thought we were on board."

"My God! what is to be done," groaned the man.

"Don't give up, but act."

"For myself I do not care, for I can rough it and work my way to the Patriot camps."

"But I got my sister into this scrape by coming here, for I thought we could get you to go with us."

"You look after Lucita, and I will take care of yourself."

"Quick, man, act, don't think!" and the boy spoke sternly, for Vance Mendoza seemed to be dazed by the sudden responsibility thrust upon him.

But the boy's words caused him to rally, and he said quickly:

"Yes, yes, we will take care of you, Senorita Lucita, for they would not perhaps notice you, if they search the house, where they would the young senor."

"I do not wish to leave my brother."

"We will meet our danger together," was the plucky reply.

"No, no, for he would be cut down before our eyes, and you would be taken back to your fortress prison."

"Come, you must stay here, and Senor Harry can go to the glen where he was in hiding when he came to arrange for the running in of the steamer with its rescuers."

"Yes, I can hide there, sister, until I get a chance to slip away to the mountain camp of the patriots."

"My camp outfit is there, hidden in a cave, and so are the signal lamps I had, and maybe they may be useful for another expedition to run in, for I don't know Captain Charley and the Cowboy Clan, if they don't return to rescue you and me, Lucita."

"Yes, we will care for you, senorita, and the Senor Harry can hide in the glen," said the overseer's wife.

"But will you be safe there, Harry," urged Lucita.

"As safe as you are here, sister."

"Dismount now and let me get rid of these horses, for I must make my way on foot to the glen."

"Yes, Senor Harry, and I will bring you provisions as soon as I dare do so."

"There is food enough there for a couple of days, Mendoza, so don't take any risks until all is safe."

"Senora Mendoza, I know you will care well for my sister."

"Yes, indeed, I will."

The brother and sister had meanwhile dismounted, and after a hasty farewell the youth slipped away in the darkness, leading the two horses, which Mendoza had stripped of their saddles and bridles.

The two Texas ponies were taken several hundred yards from the overseer's house, and then set free by Harry.

Looking back at the house the youth saw that all was dark there, for the overseer knew full well that the Spanish cavalry would soon visit him, to know if he had played any part in the landing.

This the youth also knew, and as he had several hours of night yet to make the glen, and felt anxious to know the result of the Spaniard's call, he hid in the foliage to wait.

From his position he could see the Mustang, black and without a light visible, making away at full speed, and it was hard to force back the choking sensation that rose in his throat.

But a moment after he heard the rapid fall of many hoofs, and he slunk back into the bushes, for he knew that an ordeal of life or death was before him.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNWELCOME VISITORS.

The heavy tread of half a hundred horses in a gallop fell forebodingly upon the ears of the young Texan in hiding.

The steamer was gliding swiftly seaward, he had been left in a land where death stalked about mercilessly, and a few minutes more might see him lying dead under the starlight he well knew.

With clanking of sabres the cavalry troop swept past him and on toward the overseer's home.

The Spaniards had ceased to fire upon the retreating steamer, and there was now no sound of firing.

The stars looked down upon silence now, save the murmur of the surf, the moaning of wounded men, and the tread of soldiers.

The Cowboy Rescuers had made red work of their midnight landing upon the Island of Cuba.

The fortress had been taken, and the rescue of Rafael Agramonte and his sis-

ter accomplished, while the Senora Agramonte had been taken from the villa.

The Spaniards had rallied to the scene of conflict, the Cowboy Rescuers had been pressed hard back to their steamer, and now the dead and wounded remained.

And they were many, for the terrible Texans had shown their pluck and deadly aim at close quarters.

From the landing place to the fortress dead and wounded Spaniards strewed the trail.

From the lagoon to the villa they dotted the way.

The morning breaking would show how well the Texan cowboys had done their deadly work.

But were more deaths to follow?

The Boy Bugler feared that it would be so, as he saw the troop ride toward the home of Mendoza.

He watched them halt, surround the house, and heard the loud command:

"Mendoza, come out here!"

A light glimmered within, and Mendoza appeared.

"Ah! You are there are you?" sternly said the officer of the troop.

"Yes, Senor Major."

"I had half an idea that you would not be."

"And why, senor?"

"I know that you are half an American."

"My mother was an American, senor, my father a Spaniard. I am a Cuban."

"And you pretend to be loyal to Spain?"

"Certainly, senor."

"Colonel Delrossa trusts you, and orders you protected; but I believe you secretly aid the rebels. And had I not found you at your home now I would have made quick work of you."

"Senor Major, Colonel Delrossa trusts me and allowed me to remain to care for the Agramonte plantation."

"Yes, he is very kind to the Cuban rebels, where he should kill them ere they strike the blow that will drive Spaniards from this island."

"But, are you not curious as to this trouble to-night, for you are not deaf?"

"No, senor, I have heard hard fighting down on the shore by the lagoon, and also toward the villa, while I saw a steamer running out from the coast; but my experience has been not to meddle in what does not concern me; so, not being a soldier of Spain nor a Cuban rebel, I kept close to my home."

"You were wise, Mendoza, and if you do not wish that head of yours to sever connection with your body, keep close to your home, for I give you fair warning that I will kill you at the first suspicion that you are treacherous to Spain."

"You have the power to do so at will, senor; but I am under the protection of Colonel Alfredo Delrossa."

"Caramba! It is that alone that protects you; for I believe you to be a traitor."

"I am no traitor, Senor Major Blanco Bartello."

"Time will tell whether Colonel Delrossa is right, or I."

"Will you tell me if all is right up at the villa, senor, for I dare not venture there to-night to see?"

"No, all is wrong there, for a band of filibusters, accursed Americans, landed and rescued that arch-traitor Rafael Agramonte and his sister from the mountain fortress, and took with them also the Senora Agramonte from the villa."

"They have killed over half a hundred brave Spaniards, and wounded heaven only knows how many more."

"Then you were surprised at the fortress, Senor Major?"

"Yes, Caramba! We mistook the devils for Colonel Delrossa and his guard, so let them in."

"It is their perfect knowledge of just what to do which leads me to suspect you, Mendoza, and I shall see to it that there is a guard placed over you."

"Colonel Delrossa has already placed a guard here, senor, but he left at the sound of the fighting."

"I certainly would be glad to have a guard here to protect my home, senor."

The Spanish Major's reply was a bitter oath, and dashing his spurs into the flanks of his horse he rode away at a gallop toward the villa, not without leaving a mounted soldier behind as a guard.

All that the major had said, and the answers of Mendoza, the youth in hiding distinctly heard, for they had spoken in a loud tone.

Now that the troop had gone, however, the youth to his dismay saw the Spanish cavalryman, after making a circuit of the house, ride toward the cliff and halt at the very place where the path descended to the shore, the only way he would be able to reach his hiding place in the glen a mile away.

CHAPTER XIV.

HEMMED IN.

The situation in which he found himself, through the Spanish soldier taking up the position he had, was a most critical one for the young Texan.

He knew the plantation and its surroundings well, having tramped or ridden over every acre of it after game, when visiting his brother Rafael before the breaking out of the patriot war.

He knew therefore that he could reach the glen only by going down that path to the shore, or by making a wide circuit by the very paths where the Spanish soldiers were then on in numbers looking after the wounded.

Even if he escaped being seen by them, before he could go around that way daylight would come, and it would be impossible to go along the shore to the glen and not be discovered, for the scene of the landing would be crowded by Spaniards he well knew.

If he was not found up the glen he would be in great luck, he knew, for the surroundings of the landing place would be pretty well searched.

Having heard the overseer speak the name of the Spanish officer, Hotspur Harry knew him to be a man who had been desperately in love with Stella Aquilas, and that she had repulsed him and married Rafael.

The major was a man of forty, and was said to be rich. He was attractive looking and a favorite in society, yet not liked by men or his soldiers.

Belonging to Colonel Alfredo Delrossa's regiment of cavalry, he had command of the mountain fortress, while the colonel had his quarters in the Wild Flower Plantation Villa, for no other purpose, those said who knew him best, but to protect Senora Agramonte, whom orders from the Captain General forced him to hold there as a prisoner.

Through some influence not known Major Bartello had managed to have Lucita Agramonte held a prisoner in the fortress where her brother Rafael was awaiting sentence to death as a secret insurgent.

It was said by those who were supposed to know that the major, having failed to win Stella Aquilar, was glad to have his successful rival, Rafael

Agramonte, in his power, and that he had transferred his affections to Lucita, whom he had hoped to win by saving her brother from death.

The escape of the brother and sister, therefore, had greatly enraged him, whatever was his motive, and, as the Senora Agramonte had also escaped from the villa, he was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind, for he had hoped to be able to make her suffer for her refusal of him, once she was no longer protected by Colonel Delrossa, also an old lover of the Cuban girl whom Rafael had won from his many rivals.

Whatever the motive of Major Bartello, that of Colonel Delrossa was sincere, for he was a courteous gentleman, a gallant soldier, and a noble man.

If he had had his way the colonel would never have held the Senora Agramonte and Lucita prisoners, though compelled to arrest the husband and brother.

He was a Spanish officer who did not believe in warring upon women and non-combatants.

But he was aware that there was some recent influence at Havana that forced him to act against his will, but what that influence was the colonel could not ascertain.

For his major, Bartello, Colonel Delrossa did not hold a very high opinion.

He did not like him as a man or a soldier.

But he was forced to acknowledge him officially, and did so with the best grace he could.

That Major Bartello hated his colonel many believed, and that he held more influence with those in authority in Spain all knew.

All this did Hotspur Harry know, and he was well aware of the danger to himself and his sister did Major Bartello discover that they had not escaped on the steamer.

But the young Cuban knew that his first duty was to escape that mounted soldier cutting him off from the path down the cliff.

Allowed to roam about the overseer's house at will, the Spanish guard might remain there on the cliff until daybreak.

What was to be done?

The youth was armed with his repeating rifle, belt of arms, and machete, for he had encumbered himself with them as very necessary belongings when he let the horses go free.

He could shoot the Spaniard, of course.

But that would raise an alarm.

It would also get Mendoza into trouble.

Just what to do the youth did not know.

But he was a quick thinker in time of danger, and acted with equal promptness.

He had his lariat coiled over his shoulder, and he noticed a large tree just about twenty feet behind the soldier.

"Just what I want," he muttered, and he unslung his lariat for service.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LASSO AS A WEAPON.

Would the Spanish soldier wait until his unsuspected foe could get near enough to act was the question.

This thought flashed through the mind of the young Texan, as he left the thicket and made his way to the large tree at the back of the Spaniard.

The soldier sat upon his horse like a statue, his eyes fixed upon the gulf, where the retreating steamer was then visible in the distance, from a light now visible upon her.

The Spaniard seemed to have taken up

his position there on the cliff for an indefinite time.

The youth wished he would find business to call him elsewhere.

But he did not leave.

He was without doubt gazing across the gulf to far-away Spain, and thinking of those who loved him there and longed for his return.

Nearer drew the young Texan, his lariat coiled and ready.

He reached the shelter of the tree, and the large trunk shielded him.

Placing his rifle against it, he unbuckled his belt of arms, and placed them upon the ground.

He did not wish to be hampered in his movements so as to prevent a perfect throw of the lasso.

One end he made fast around the tree, and then he caught the coil and took his stand ready to throw the fatal noose.

The soldier sat still in deepest reverie.

His horse was equally as motionless, but his drooping head indicated that he was asleep.

The man and horse were boldly, relieved against the starlit sky.

The boy now stepped out from the tree about with orders.

Another and another whirl was made around his head, to get the weight, the aim, and the distance exactly.

The young Texan was known in the Cowboy Clan as the most expert of lasso throwers.

Now it would be a throw for his life, or the Spaniard's.

Up toward the villa voices were heard and the thud of hoofs as men dashed about with orders.

Down on the shore where the battle had been fought, other voices were heard, and lights flashed here and there as the soldiers searched for their dead and wounded comrades.

But there on the cliff and over toward the overseer's house all was as silent as the grave.

Only the chirp of insects and the song of a nightbird could be heard.

Swifter and swifter whirled the lasso, and then it shot out from the strong and nervy hand of the youth with a sudden swish.

The horse still slept, for he had not moved.

The rider was still lost in reverie.

But the man and the horse were awakened, the one from his reverie, the other from slumber, suddenly and rudely.

The noose of the lariat had settled over the head of the Spaniard, and a drag on the line had brought it taut.

The horse, startled, and beholding some one behind him, forgetful of the cliff a few steps in front of him, sprang forward.

Too late he realized his error.

In vain he tried to check himself upon the edge.

The cliff crumbled beneath his iron-shod hoofs, and down he went with almost a human moan of anguish.

And the rider?

The man had felt the noose tighten about his neck, and, as he did so, the horse plunged downward, he still in his saddle.

But the lasso tightened with a sharp twang, the cry of the Spaniard's lips was choked off, and, while the horse went downward, the rider was checked in midair, and hung there, his neck broken by the sudden drag upon it.

The boy heard the dull thud of the horse as he fell far below, and knew by the twang of the lariat that the Spaniard had been dragged from his saddle.

It was more than the youth had expected.

He had expected to make the man a prisoner, not to kill him.

But the horse had gone down to the beach below and lay there crushed to atoms.

The rider was hanging dead at the end of the rope.

A moment Hotspur Harry stood in silence, awed by the tragedy.

He dare not remain longer, for something must be done, and quickly.

He ran to the edge of the cliff and shuddered as he saw the swaying form.

But he drew it upward, laid it upon the cliff, felt for a heart beat, found none, then loosened the noose, and pushed the body over after the horse.

"It had to be.

"They'll think his horse carried him over.

"Now I must 'git up and git,' as the cowboys say."

With this Hotspur Harry coiled his lasso, picked up his weapons, and went swiftly down the cliff path toward his hiding place.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN HIDING.

Down the steep cliff path the young Texan made his way.

Reaching the shore he turned to the left and passing the bodies of the man and horse, he pushed on to where the glen ran back into the hills.

Up this he made his way, and a walk of half a mile brought him to its end, and there steep walls of rock overhung him.

But he had found there among the rocks a cave, when he was before in Cuba, and he did not believe that it was known to any one save the overseer and himself.

There he had remained in hiding when he had come to the island alone and ahead of the Cowboy Rescuers, and there he had that night of their coming left his camp outfit, not expecting to so soon need it again.

But there he was back in his retreat, and, climbing up to it, he unrolled his blankets and was soon asleep.

The dawn was breaking as he dropped off into a deep slumber, for he was not one to worry about future trouble.

He would await its coming.

The day had passed noon when he awoke, and he had awakened with a start, for he heard voices.

He dared not peer out from his retreat, but he knew that there were Spanish soldiers dangerously near to him.

Speaking Spanish perfectly as he did, he heard the words of the soldiers, and set them down as half a dozen in number.

They were looking to see if any of the Cowboy Invaders had come up the glen or their horses had strayed there.

The cavern was about ten feet over their heads, opened into a rent in the cliff, and could not be seen unless one climbed up the steep wall of rocks.

If the soldiers did not climb up the rocks, he was safe.

If they did not know of the cavern, they would hardly do any climbing, for the Spanish soldier is proverbially lazy.

The Spaniards were discussing the daring landing of the cowboys, and wondering if they had not sent a force on into the mountains with munitions of war to join the insurgents.

Hotspur Harry heard the sergeant in command of the squad say that he would give a month's pay to know.

He could have told him, but he didn't. "Come sergeant, there is no rebel, dead or alive, or horse here, let us return, for it's dinner time," said a soldier.

To the great delight of Hotspur Harry the others seemed of the same opinion and departed.

The young Texan gave a sigh of relief, and the suggestion about dinner time reminded him that he was hungry.

Out of his haversack, left at the cavern, he took a cold "snack" and ate it. Then he went to sleep again.

It was night when he again awoke, and, eating sparingly of his food, he decided to go out and reconnoitre.

He was not sure when Mendoza could visit him.

Down the glen he went with all caution. Glancing along the coast, he saw the body of the Spaniard who had gone over the cliff had been removed, while the horse had been dragged upon the beach for the waves to carry off.

This proved that the Spaniards had been busy during the day.

But what idea had they formed as to the cause of the Spanish guard's going over the cliff, he wondered.

On to the little valley he made his way, to the lagoon.

All was quiet there. Only the dead kept vigil on the lagoon's banks, for the youth stumbled over a number of newly made graves.

"There is a whole graveyard of them here. The cowboys did desperate work, surely," Harry reflected.

Then he made his way back to the path up the cliff, and had reached the top when he started back and hid among the rocks, for some one was approaching.

Nearer the person came.

"It must be Mendoza," inferred the watchful Harry.

A moment more he called out:

"Mendoza!"

The overseer started, dropped his hand upon a weapon.

"Harry! Is it you?"

"Ay, ay!"

"Glad I found you here, for a mounted sentinel makes the rounds of my house every hour, calling me up each time. He has just left, and I started with this bundle for the glen.

"Now we can talk together, and I will get back in plenty of time."

"You are an awful good fellow, Senor Mendoza, and I thank you. How is my sister?"

"All right, but anxious about you."

"Tell her I am lovely. Six soldiers and a sergeant came up to see me, but didn't stay, so that ended their search. How goes it up at the villa?"

"I am sorry to say that Colonel Del-rossa, who was a noble man, has been ordered to Havana for some reason, and Major Blanco Bartello, as bad as they make them, has taken up his quarters in the villa, for he is in command now."

"That means danger to us, eh?"

"Indeed it does."

"Well, I'll keep in hiding for some time, and then, if the cowboys do not come back, as I feel sure they will, I'll skip some night for the camp of General Gomez and get him to let me come down with a band of patriots to attack Major Bartello and rescue my sister."

"Yes, unless the cowboys return for you it will be best, for you can't keep in hiding always, and I have fear of your sister being discovered any day."

"But I have some food and other things here for you, and say we meet here three nights from this."

"All right."

"If I don't come one hour, I will the next."

"I'll wait, for I have just now lots of time upon my hands that I don't know what to do with," and with a hand grasp and good-by the two friends parted.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STRANGE CRAFT.

Time did hang heavily upon the hands of the youth in hiding, though he had the books which Lucita had suggested the overseer should take to him, and spent a great deal of the day in sleeping.

"If I'm behind in sleep I'll catch up now," was his philosophical way of putting it.

The third night, as agreed upon, he was at the rendezvous appointed with the overseer.

After a considerable time the overseer appeared, but, as the youth had seen the Spanish guard upon his rounds, he had known the cause of the delay.

The youth greeted him warmly and in his dry way:

"You and I are still alive, Mendoza, and I hope you have as much to say for your wife and my sister, for Spaniards respect neither sex or age."

"They are alive, also, yet the senorita is most anxious about you."

"I should be the least of her troubles, tell her, for I have nothing to do but to read, eat, and sleep, and I'm rather tired of the monotony of all three."

"But time passes, and if the cowboys come back at all, it will be before very long."

"I hope so, Senor Harry."

"But I have more books and food for you."

"No more sleep, I hope, for I've had enough of that."

"I've got something to tell you."

"Well?"

"The mountain fortress has been strengthened and half a thousand more troops sent there, while a couple of hundred cavalymen are camped in the villa grounds, for Major Bartello is there, occupying the best room, and I furnish him with fresh supplies, for it gives me a chance to find out much."

"If my Cowboy Clan gets hold of those Spanish troopers they'll wish they were in Spain," muttered the young Texan, and then he asked:

"Any more news, Mendoza?"

"Nothing more than about the increase of the Spanish force, which now must number a thousand men within four leagues of the Wild Flower Plantation."

"They are preparing against another landing."

"I guess they fear one; but let me ask you if you saw any Spaniards the night you went to the glen after leaving my house?"

"I saw one, but he did not see me."

"I thought as much."

"It was the guard."

"Yes."

"You lassoed him?"

"Ah! How did you know that?"

"I had to cook breakfast for Major Bartello and take it to the lagoon, where the steamer landed, and the guard had been missed, but later found at the base of the cliff."

"They supposed his horse had fallen over through his going too near and its caving in under his weight, but I knew better, for it had caved but little; the man would not have gone that near, and I noticed a bruised streak around the neck of the soldier, just as I have seen around the neck of a hanged man when I was in Texas and Mexico."

"So knowing that I had my lasso with me, you supposed that I had been using it?"

"Yes, as I saw that the guard fell from the cliff right where the path was, and about the tree near was a ring cut in the soft bark."

"Your life in Texas taught you much, Senor Mendoza," said the boy with a

smile, and then he told about the death of the sentinel.

Back to his cabin retreat went the youth, the overseer to his home, and several days more passed ere they met again at the head of the cliff path.

Another and another meeting they had, and the youth had at last told the overseer that he had decided to make his way to the camp of General Gomez, as it seemed as though the cowboys did not intend to return, or had been prevented for some reason in doing so.

"Wait three days more, Senor Harry, before you go."

"See if anything turns up then in your favor," said the overseer, and Hotspur Harry agreed to it.

The three days passed and the youth again sallied forth from his retreat to go to the rendezvous.

The time had been set for as near midnight as possible, for among the middle hours the overseer had said the Spanish guard sometimes missed several rounds.

As he came out of the glen, the youth glanced seaward, and was surprised to see a vessel headed close in shore.

Was it Spanish? No, for a Spanish cruiser would carry lights.

It must be a filibuster craft, for not a light was visible, and the vessel was small, running at reduced speed, and heading for the mouth of the lagoon.

Nearer it came, and the youth suddenly recognized it, for he had run to the lagoon, where it flowed into the gulf.

"It is the American yacht Faithful, the very craft that brought me to Cuba when I came ahead of the Cowboy Clan."

"I'll warrant that Captain Leon De Leon, that brave yachtsman, has come to rescue Lucita and myself."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE COURIER YACHT.

Keeping in hiding, the young Texan watched the lightless yacht, silent as a spectre, glide into the lagoon's mouth and make fast to the bank.

Then he called out in a low tone:

"Ho, the Faithful!"

"Ah! Who calls?"

"Harry Agramonte."

"Thank the Lord," and a tall form stepped quickly toward the youth as he appeared indistinctly in the gloom.

"Captain De Leon, you have again come to Cuba," said the youth.

"Yes, the last time I came to bring you, as the avant courier of your Cowboy Rescuers; but now, urged by that sweet little Cuban lady in Key West, who is to become my wife, I have come to see if I could find out aught of you and your sister, for Captain Chase wrote me that you both had been left here in his retreat, and he intended to soon return with a large force and attempt your rescue, but wished to learn if I could find out anything as to your fate."

"I at once determined to run here, land a Cuban with me, who knew this coast well, and let him see what he could discover, returning for him another night, for I do not wish to do aught that is lawless, you know, though my yacht's papers will protect me, or avenge me if the Spaniards do not heed them."

"Thank Heaven, I find you here, and, if you and your sister cannot go out with me, I'll go and meet the cowboys' steamer and tell Captain Chase where to find you."

Hotspur Harry heard the story of the young American yachtsman with deepest interest.

It told him that the Cowboy Clan had not deserted their Boy Bugler.

After a moment of thought the youth

decided that it would be best to go on to the head of the cliff, meet the overseer, tell him the situation, and have him go back to bring Lucita there, so that both could leave in the yacht.

This was decided upon, and the youth at once went back toward the cliff path, while the yacht lay quietly in the lagoon, her crew talking in whispers.

Up the path went the young Texan, and at the top of the cliff he waited.

He grew impatient as the minutes passed, and at last began to think that Mendoza had been there and gone.

An hour went by, another, and he felt sure that something had kept the overseer from keeping the appointment.

Could he have mistaken the night?

No Spanish sentinel appeared, and this was a surprise to Harry, not to see him upon his rounds.

"It is growing so late I must go and send the yacht away."

"That gallant young captain must run no more risks, so I'll tell him not to return, but to meet Captain Chase and tell him to come in on such a night, and I'll show signals as before, and be waiting for the vessel."

"I am half tempted to go on to the house, but I might get Mendoza into trouble if I was seen and captured."

"I'll go back and send the yacht off."

With this the youth descended the path, walked rapidly back to the lagoon, and found Captain De Leon pacing to and fro, while he was getting a little nervous at the long delay.

"Ah! back again at last; but alone."

"Yes, Captain De Leon," and then Hotspur Harry explained the situation and urged the yachtsman to put to sea at once.

"I will take you with me at least."

"No, no, sir, I would not go, not knowing what had happened to my sister."

"But I will bring you back to-morrow night."

"No, sir, it is too dangerous for you to run in."

"I remember your last run and chase by the Spanish vessels, and cruisers are constantly passing up and down the coast."

"I can outrun the fleetest of them."

"Yes, sir, but you might be crippled and so caught."

"You must go, sir, and tell Captain Chase, for if the Cowboy Clan come in I don't care for the Spaniards."

"I forgot to tell you that Captain Chase wrote that your brother and his wife would return with him, along with a larger force of cowboys, enough to hold their own if attacked."

"I am glad to hear this, for the headquarters are now at Wild Flower Plantation, and there are a thousand men of all arms within two hours' call, while Colonel Delrossa has been ordered to Havana and Major Blanco Bartello is in command."

"Please tell this to my brother, Captain De Leon, and he will understand just the situation, so can act promptly upon landing."

"I will, and I'll meet the steamer Mustang, with her Cowboy Filibusters, off Key West as before."

"Now, good-by, for I must get away, as I cannot fight if cornered, with my small crew and toy yacht guns."

It was with a sad heart that Captain De Leon bade the young Texan good-by, leaving him behind on the island; but it had to be done, and the yacht backed out into the waters of the gulf, swung her sharp prow around, and went flying seaward, silent as a phantom, dark and ghastly.

Hotspur Harry stood watching her, and as she was disappearing in the distance a large cruiser rounded the headland, the dark craft far away was sighted, and the thunder of a heavy gun was heard, as a solid shot was fired after the Faithful.

But the yacht was well away, and the shots fell short, to Harry's great delight, while, conscious of his own danger, as the firing would bring Spanish soldiers to the shore, he sped along for his retreat in the cavern.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SURPRISE.

Hotspur Harry well knew that the firing of the cruiser in the night close to the coast would rouse all the Spanish soldiers within hearing, and along the shores and inland troops would be patrolling as soon as daylight came.

Perhaps he would have to again face the ordeal of a search party in the glen near the lagoon.

Again, it would be thought that another party of filibusters had been landed, or were driven off by the Spanish cruiser when about to land.

Again was there excitement on the Wild Flower Plantation, and this would make it be doubly guarded.

Brave as he was, Hotspur Harry begun to dread the outcome.

Mendoza, the overseer, had failed to meet him, as usual, and it was an ominous sign the more he thought of it.

But the young Texan was not one to surrender readily, and returning to his retreat, he calmly went to his blanket bed and to sleep.

It was broad day when he awoke, and he knew that the ordeal was upon him, for he heard the sound of voices and hoofs as well.

A party of Spanish cavalry were coming up the glen.

They came, too, as though they had a definite object in view.

Soon they drew near the cliff in which was the cavern, and to his great relief Hotspur Harry heard an officer say:

"It is evident that no one landed, for we have not found a trace of them, and this glen is the place for them to have hidden if they did not push for the mountains."

"And few could hide here," responded another.

"They may, at least, have landed a courier, so we will make a search, for he could not have gone on to the mountains, as it was too near dawn."

The men, a score of them, were then ordered to search the head of the glen among the rocks and underbrush.

They dismounted and did so, and for ten minutes did Hotspur Harry sit in his retreat enduring the severe ordeal.

"No one here, sir," called out a soldier, and he was not fifteen feet from where the youth was.

"I could tell him differently," grimly said the young Texan, and he felt relieved as others of the searchers made the same report.

"All right, it is well for those who landed that they cannot be found, for they would be shown no mercy."

"This is a war to the knife and knife to the hilt, a Black Flag war, that means no mercy to rebels and their sympathizers, and Major Bartello says that we are to kill on sight," said the officer.

"But the Cubans will also raise the Black Flag against Spaniards," added the other.

"I wonder that they have not done so before; but let them do so, and it will more quickly end this rebellion."

"I tell you, senor, that Major Bartello is the man to fight insurgents, and he has made up his mind to spare no one in future, and that is just my idea, too."

"But if any landed they have escaped us, but woe be unto them next time."

With this the Spanish officer rode back down the canyon, followed by his men.

As they got some distance off Hotspur Harry peeped out of his hiding place and gazing at them, with a smile upon his face, he brought his thumb up to his nose and begun to move his fingers in a way so well known in the United States to mean derision, defiance, and "a can't come it, you know," expression.

The visit of the Spaniards told Hotspur Harry what he had to expect if captured.

The edict had gone forth that "no mercy" was to be shown to Cubans.

The Spaniards intended fighting under the black flag.

"I don't see the use of saying that," muttered the Texan, "for that is always their style in dealing with Cuban patriots; yes, and with women and children, too, Brother Rafael has told me."

"If they capture a prisoner they shoot him afterwards."

"Ah, yes; the Spaniards love to fight that way, and I am glad to know Major Bartello's intention, for the Cowboy Clan will understand what to expect, and I guess they can fight under a black flag if forced to as well as the Spaniards."

"But I must lay low here for a day or two, as they will have the whole coast protected to-night."

And "lie low" the young fugitive did for several days, for several times was the glen visited.

At last, however, matters seemed to have quieted down, and, as his provisions were running low, and he felt more anxious about those up at the overseer's house, he decided to venture forth.

He was sure the Mustang would soon be off the coast, and he wished to tell Lucita just what to expect, and urge Mendoza and his family to go out with them, for he was sure the overseer would get into trouble if he remained.

So out of his retreat he crept one night, silently glided down the glen, paused some time before he went along the coast, but, confident that no one was there, he went on, reached the path up the cliff, and ascended.

Cautiously he peered over, and saw no one.

The house of the overseer was dark and silent.

Across the open space he went, reached the house, and was about to knock upon the door, when suddenly he heard the stern command in Spanish:

"Move, and you are a dead man!"

CHAPTER XX.

A STARTLING RECOGNITION.

Lucita Agramonte was fretting under her close confinement to the house of the overseer.

Both Mendoza and his wife were devoted to her, and as kind as they could be; but she knew the deadly peril her young brother was in, and the suspense of his fate and hers was terrible.

She dared not show herself for a moment, fearing discovery, and only now and then would go to the windows and look out when the Spanish soldiers were not on their rounds.

She was fearful of being seen then, and was most careful.

One day she watched the guard ride away toward the villa and then she approached the window and looked out.

She was so fond of outdoor exercise and

of riding, driving, and boating that to be cooped up was a great hardship to her.

As she looked out upon the bright sunshine she suddenly gave a cry and started back.

"What is it, Lucita?" anxiously asked the Senora Mendoza.

"Did I see his face, or was it imagination?" she cried.

"Whose face, Senorita?" kindly asked the woman.

"The face of a man I knew in Texas, one whom I hate.

"I was looking over the grounds and his face peered at me over yonder rose-bush—heaven have mercy! It was no hallucination, but a reality.

"There he comes!"

As she spoke her face was livid and she stood trembling with dread.

Gazing out of the window the Senora Mendoza saw a man of fine appearance approaching the house.

He was on foot, dressed in the uniform of an officer of Spanish cavalry, and was apparently alone.

"It is a Spaniard, senorita."

"So I have always believed, but in Texas he claimed to be a Mexican.

"He is a bad man at heart, I know."

"He has seen you, senorita."

"Oh, yes, hiding is useless now.

"But what is he doing in Cuba, and in Spanish uniform?"

A moment more and the man came upon the veranda that ran across the overseer's house.

His knock at the door was answered by the Senora Mendoza, and he said:

"I desire to see the Senorita Agramonte, who is your guest."

"I am here, Senor Don Ruiz Valdez.

"May I ask why I see you in Cuba and in Spanish uniform, when you claimed to be an American citizen?" and Lucita, feeling that further disguise was useless, stepped forward.

Her cool manner and words took the Don aback, and for an instant he seemed confused, but said:

"If you will go with me, Senorita Agramonte, to yonder arbor on the cliff I will explain my presence, for there we will not be overheard."

Lucita Agramonte at once obeyed.

She seemed to feel that it was useless to do otherwise, and the two walked to the arbor, where she sat down while the Don remained standing.

"Now, Senor Don, I will hear your explanation," she said coolly.

"I came here to save you, senorita."

"From what?"

"I know all, senorita."

"I know that Captain Chase, your brother Harry, and a band of cowboys landed on this coast to rescue the Senor Rafael Agramonte, his wife, and yourself, and that in their bold work they were partially successful, for you were left behind and Hotspur Harry also.

"Where Harry is I do not know, but you were seen by a soldier this morning, and I came here to have a talk with you, for I am up at your house, the villa."

"And a Spanish officer?"

"Let me tell you that I am a Spaniard, that I was exiled from Spain for a term of years, upon charges that were false.

"The charge was proved to have been unfounded only a short while ago, and I was written to at once to return and assume my rights there, receiving my army rank once more.

"I did not care to return, for I had made a new home in America, but I learned of your having been left in Cuba.

"I at once determined to use my restored rights to save you, and I sailed for Havana.

"There I learned that my regiment was guarding this part of the coast, with headquarters in your old home.

"I also found that I had been promoted to the rank of major, the officer holding that rank being advanced to the colonelcy, for the regimental commander had been ordered to Havana for being too lenient with the Cuban insurgents.

"I saw my chance to find you, for I could not believe either you or your young brother to be dead, and I came here at once and joined Colonel Blanco Bartello, as he now is, and whom you know, he tells me.

"I showed my authority for searching for you, and placing both you and your brother under my protection, though, I confess, to gain it, I had to say what was not true, for I told the Captain General that you were to be my wife."

"Don Ruiz Valdez! How dare you?"

"It was necessary to gain the power I hold, and I tell you frankly, Senorita Agramonte, that it must so appear, as Heaven only knows what the end may be to you or your brother, for he is in hiding, I feel sure, but will be found, and there is no hope of escape."

"I will not act a lie to save my life, senor."

"But I will pledge you my word to hold no claim upon you the moment that you and Hotspur Harry are safe."

"I accept no terms, Don Ruiz Valdez, on such conditions," was the firm response of Lucita.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DON'S VELVET HAND.

The Don was taken aback at the words of Lucita Agramonte.

He had told her the truth only in part, for he had been exiled from Spain years before, but had been pardoned and restored to his rights, the wreck of a once large fortune, and given the rank of major in the regiment he had been a lieutenant in, but on condition that he would serve in Cuba.

Going to Havana he had been well received by the Captain General, and pretending that he knew of a number of American filibusters that were to land on the island, and he could capture them, having spies among them, he was sent to join Colonel Blanco Bartello, who had been made commander in place of Colonel Delrossa.

He had told the Captain General that he was engaged to Lucita, who was an American girl, born in Texas, and living with her rebel brother and his wife in Cuba.

Then it was that Don Ruiz had hastened to Wild Flower Plantation, confident that Lucita and the Boy Bugler were in hiding somewhere about the plantation.

He had a long talk with Colonel Bartello, and then set out to play the spy.

As ill fortune would have it, he at once, almost, discovered Lucita at the window of the overseer's house, and the meeting with him followed.

If he could make Lucita Agramonte believe he owed her safety to him, if he could capture Hotspur Harry, and hold his life at stake, he believed he could force the Texas girl to become his wife.

Thus the plot of the Don is made plain, and his prompt flight from his ranch to Havana, and gaining the power he really possessed as a Spanish officer, placed Lucita Agramonte in a very critical position.

But the Texas girl was not to be forced or driven.

She was plucky and determined, and she boldly told Don Ruiz that she would accept no favor at his hands upon the conditions he had named.

Devotedly loving Captain Charlie Chase, she was not one to give him up even to save life.

The Don looked at Lucita in a way that it was hard to read.

After all, would she escape him?

Would she defy him in spite of the position he found her in?

At last he said, and he made up his mind to make no mistake by an exhibition of temper:

"I believe in time you will see me, senorita, that it is best for you and those you love to at least put on the semblance of friendship for me.

"You know that I love you, for it is an old story to you; but I will not force myself upon you.

"I have simply sought the right to protect you by claiming that you were my promised wife."

"Which I will not admit, senor, to save my life."

"You know best."

"But now Colonel Bartello says that you must return to your home, the villa, and where your servants still are, and where the Senora Mendoza can accompany you.

"In the wing occupied by the Senora Agramonte you will be secluded, and Colonel Bartello, occupying the other part of the house, as did Colonel Delrossa, will but be a protection to you."

"I prefer to stay here."

"But Mendoza will then be arrested as a suspect, while there at the villa he can see you."

"I will go there to save him and his wife from harm," and Lucita was beginning to wonder as to poor Harry's fate.

True, Mendoza would find some way to still help the youth, but as a prisoner he could not do so.

After some further conversation, the plans were arranged that they should go to the villa, but not until the following day, as there would be much to be done.

This Lucita was firm in, for she knew that that night Mendoza was to meet Hotspur Harry, and the youth must be told all that had happened and be given supplies sufficient to last him for some time.

Then, too, the Don had unintentionally let fall a hint that the house of the overseer would be used as a guardhouse by the Spaniards.

Escorting her to the house again Don Ruiz informed the Senora Mendoza of the plan and then returned to the villa.

Mendoza came in soon after and was told all, and the three were positively alarmed at the situation, but congratulated themselves upon a chance to inform Hotspur Harry that night.

But this hope soon faded away, for a soldier came with a note for Lucita.

With a dread of evil she opened it and read that Colonel Bartello ordered that the removal should be made at once, and that soldiers, an ambulance, and wagons would be soon there to remove the household to the villa.

The note was a most courteous one, and from the Don, who said he had in vain pleaded for delay until the morrow.

To get to the glen and acquaint Hotspur Harry with what had happened was impossible, and so Mendoza, his wife, and child, and Lucita, had to accept the situation and prepare for the removal, for a squad of soldiers had already arrived at the house, to take up their quarters there as soon as they should leave.

CHAPTER XXII.

DOOMED TO DEATH.

It was the saddest moment of her life when Lucita Agramonte returned to the villa, her old home, and took up her abode there.

Colonel Bartello received her courteously, but there was an expression of triumph upon his face he could not hide.

She and the Mendozas were to occupy one wing of the large mansion, the Spanish officers the other, so that they would be well apart.

Mendoza knew that he was shadowed by a Spaniard constantly, so he could not get away to warn Hotspur Harry or carry him the needed supplies.

Night came on and Lucita and the Mendozas were very blue.

They were anxious about Harry.

Yet the overseer dared not leave the villa.

He was told to manage the estate as before, but given to understand that he was regarded as a secret insurgent and would be shot at the first suspicion of treachery to Spain.

It was that night that the yacht Faithful ran in, and the heavy guns awakened all in the night.

Lucita supposed that it was Captain Chase returning to rescue her and Harry.

But the firing soon ceased, as the yacht ran away from the cruiser, and they breathed more freely, for the Spaniards were in great alarm, yet did not know what to do.

"Captain Chase and his Cowboy Clan could stampede Colonel Bartello and his whole command, even with the Don to help them," Lucita said to Mendoza.

"Indeed, the captain could, senorita."

"But what about the Senor Harry?" asked the overseer.

The night passed, and the next day the Spaniards were dashing about with great energy.

The sunlight dispelled the fear of an enemy hiding on the coast.

Thus the days wore on, and Mendoza, in leaving the villa, and going about the plantation, had been accompanied by a guard of two soldiers constantly, while at night a watch was placed in the wing of the villa in which he dwelt.

The greatest anxiety was felt for the safety of Hotspur Harry, but as he had not been brought in a prisoner, it was hoped that he had escaped to the patriot camp, for had he been killed Don Ruiz would surely have reported it.

Then it was hoped that he had escaped in the vessel the Spaniards had reported as having landed near the lagoon, believing his sister safe.

Lucita believed that the vessel must have been the Mustang, with the Cowboy Filibusters, who had deemed it best to return upon another night.

Thus believing, she still kept up hope, for did the cowboys land she knew that she and the Mendozas would be very quickly rescued by them, as no few hundred Spaniards could check them.

But when at breakfast one morning Mendoza came in, his face as white as death.

"They have caught him, senorita."

"My brother?"

"Yes, senorita."

"Is he dead or a prisoner?"

"A prisoner, senorita."

"That is better, for the cowboys will rescue him," was the hopeful reply.

"How did it happen?" asked Senora Mendoza.

"I do not know."

"They had him at our home when I went there on my round of duties this morning."

Soon after Don Ruiz sent his card to Lucita and asked an interview.

She promptly granted it, and heard how Hotspur Harry had come out of his hiding place, gone to the home of the overseer, and been captured by the soldiers there, for he had been seen coming from the path.

"What does he say?" asked Lucita.

"Nothing."

"He simply took the situation like the brave fellow he is, asked no questions, and would answer none."

"Where is he?"

"In the villa."

"I had him brought here, and I tried hard to get Colonel Bartello to allow him to go upon his parole and my pledge."

"And he would not?"

"He refused."

"He says that your brother came here with the Texans who rescued Senor Rafael Agramonte and yourself from the fortress, released his wife from imprisonment here, and got left behind, as you did, in some way."

"This is punishable with death, and Colonel Bartello says that the boy must be tried as a rebel, and will be executed if found guilty."

"Why have the mockery, of a trial, Don Ruiz, for it is useless?"

"But Harry is a mere boy, and his life should be spared, for he came here only to rescue his brother and those he loved."

"Very true, senorita."

"But the fact of his coming alone dooms him."

"Yes, for Colonel Bartello has raised the Black Flag against all Cubans, be they soldiers, old or young women, or children."

"He is a merciless monster, and as he sows so shall he reap, mark my words, and you, Don Ruiz Valdós, Major in the Black Flag Regiment of Colonel Bartello, will suffer with those with whom you have cast your lot, for mark my words, Cubans are in this fight to win, and woe be to those Spaniards who raised the Black Flag against them."

The man was deeply impressed by her words and manner.

She spoke with intense passion, and he dared not meet her blazing eyes.

But he could but admire her the more, and said, earnestly:

"Lucita, if you will promise to become my wife I will save your brother from death."

"If I refuse?"

"He must die."

"That shows how despicable you are, for you have the power to save him, and do so only at my sacrifice," said Lucita, with scorn.

Then she added:

"Much as I love my brave young brother, I refuse to sacrifice myself to you, for he would not have it."

"I will die by my own hand when he is murdered by your act, Ruiz Valdós, so do your worst, for I defy you!"

"I will do my worst, for he shall die," shouted the man, stung to the quick by her words, and hastily leaving the room, while Lucita sank upon the floor in a deep swoon.

There the Senora Mendoza found her, and when her husband and herself had restored her to consciousness, she said, plaintively:

"If I had only died."

"Why did you bring me back to life?"

Several hours after Mendoza came in with more sad news.

Harry Agramonte, the brave Boy Bugler of the Cowboys' Clan, an Amer-

ican-born citizen, a youth in his teens, had been tried by the Spaniards and, found guilty, was sentenced to be shot to death at sunrise the following morning.

Then Mendoza added:

"And I am to be tried to-morrow."

"The Black Flags are merciless to all Cubans who love Cuba Libre."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE COWBOY FILIBUSTERS.

The night set in dark and stormy.

A severe gale came on as the sun went down, and the Spanish soldiers kept close within their quarters.

Mendoza had been arrested, and was a prisoner in the same room in the villa where the Boy Bugler was in irons, sentenced to die upon the morrow.

Don Ruiz Valdós had it in his power to save him, and he would play his last card on the morrow, when Lucita saw her brother in irons marching out to die.

To the surprise of Mendoza, Hotspur Harry did not seem to have lost his nerve.

He had told Don Ruiz he would rather die than see his sister his wife, and he meant it.

"Don't get blue, Mendoza, for luck may come our way to-night."

"You see this gale will drive the Spanish cruisers to harbor, and the soldiers will not be on the watch ashore, and the Mustang should have been off the coast two days ago, if the yacht Faithful met her all right."

"This is just the weather for filibusters, and Taos, the Pilot, is on the Mustang, and I believe she'll come in."

"If she does, the only risk we run is in being shot down if the cowboys charge the villa."

"I'm going to sleep and wait to see what will turn up."

"Well, you are the pluckiest boy I ever saw, Senor Harry, and Heaven's everlasting curse fall upon those who take your life," said Mendoza.

But Hotspur Harry made no reply.

He had made himself as comfortable as possible for a nap, for he had an abiding faith in Charlie Chase and his cowboys.

They would surely come, even though they came too late to save his life.

Had he been able to have seen, out upon the storm-swept waters of the gulf just then, his heart would have bounded with joy.

There was a vessel moving in toward the coast.

Her prow was pointed toward the mouth of the lagoon.

Not a light was visible on board, and she pushed through the waves in a determined way that meant business.

Upon her deck were many men, and horses saddled and ready to land.

By each horse stood his rider, calming the animal in the wild sea that was running, while showers of spray dashed over them.

At the helm was Taos, the Cuban Pilot, and by his side were Captain Chase, the Cowboy Clan's chief; Rafael Agramonte, and his wife, all in storm coats, but Stella now dressed in her pretty uniform, as a Cuban Amazon.

"Now I get my bearings, senor."

"We are all right, for the mouth of the lagoon is dead ahead," said Taos, the Pilot, as he marked some point on the black shores.

"As we get no signals, Harry evidently did not expect us to run in on such a night, for Captain De Leon told us, you know, that he would be constantly on the watch, and at the beacons," said Rafael Agramonte.

"We do not need them, now Taos has his bearings; but I wish Harry was on the watch for us," Captain Chase responded.

"Nearer and nearer the Mustang drew to the coast.

She had met the Faithful, and Captain De Leon had told how Lucita was safe in the overseer's house and Hotspur Harry was in hiding.

The Cowboy Filibusters would not have to go to the fortress to rescue them, but could perhaps get Lucita from Mendoza's home, and then Rafael Agramonte and his wife, with two-score of Texans, who had decided to remain in Cuba, and Taos as their guide, could strike for the patriot camps in the mountains, reaching there before daybreak, while the Mustang, having accomplished her mission, would return to Texas with the fair Texan and the Boy Bugler on board.

As an American, Captain Chase did not care to do more than rescue those he had come for, and land Rafael Agramonte and those who wished to remain with him and join the patriots on the coast of Cuba.

Straight as an arrow in its flight, under the skilled hand of the Cuban pilot, the Mustang ran into the lagoon, and was brought alongside of the bank and made fast.

Taos, the Pilot, and Rafael Agramonte went off to reconnoitre, while the vessel was landing the horses and men.

Within the hour they returned, Rafael Agramonte having ventured dangerously near the overseer's home.

"We saw nothing of Harry and the home of the overseer is occupied by some Spanish soldiers, for I saw them there.

"Something has happened, and perhaps poor Harry has been captured or killed.

"The villa is the place to go, and I will guide you there, keeping my party separate from yours, so I can make a dash for the mountains as soon as I know just what is the situation."

This plan decided upon, the men mounted, and Rafael, with his wife on one side, Taos, the Pilot, on the other, and his volunteers following, started ahead.

Then came Captain Chase and his Cowboy Clan.

At the steamer two Gatling guns were in position to sweep down the Spaniards if they pursued, and the crew were armed with repeating rifles and ready for work.

The gangplanks were so arranged that the horses could be ridden on board and the steamer at once back out of the lagoon.

After a ride of fifteen minutes Rafael Agramonte halted and pointed to the lights of the villa.

"This is my road, direct to the mountains, and I am sure no Spaniards are on it.

"I will wait here to cover your retreat, and then can ride for it, when I know the result.

"If Lucita and Harry are prisoners, why I will be here in Cuba to do what I can for them.

"And I will return for them if I hear from you that they can be rescued, if we fail to-night.

"Now, I will say good-by to you and Stella, for no one knows what is before us—ah! who is that?"

"Drop him if he refuses to halt!"

A shot rang out at one of the horsemen who had been edging to the front,

and suddenly spurred away toward the villa.

The shot emptied the saddle, and a cowboy called out:

"It is the Mexican, sir, Andrea, and he was wrong to warn the Spaniards of our approach.

"Several times he tried to ride off after landing."

"His fate is just, then.

"The Spaniards are aroused, so follow me.

"Charge, my gallant Cowboy Filibusters!" cried Captain Chase.

With wild yells the Cowboy Clan followed their leader, and into the camp of the surprised and terrified Spaniards they dashed, their repeating rifles and revolvers rattling merrily.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

It was a complete surprise.

The Spaniards were surprised in their camp in the grounds of the Wild Flower Villa, and the weapons of the Texans made wild havoc among them.

It was a stampede, for with the wild yells and rapid rattle of rifles and revolvers the Spaniards seemed to feel that Gomez and his patriot soldiers were upon them.

Colonel Bartello and Don Ruiz Valdos appeared in the grand hall of the villa, saw that the cowboys were carrying all before them, and they had to fly for their lives, for resistance was apparently useless.

Just as they disappeared out of a door bounded the Boy Bugler and Mendoza, for their guards had fled.

Using their chains as weapons, they rushed upon the retreating Spanish soldiers, striking right and left, the Boy Bugler shouting:

"These are the Black Flags who show no mercy.

"Let no mercy be shown them!"

"Ho, Harry, you know this villa well, so find your sister and retreat with her down the trail and you'll find your brother awaiting you.

"Remain there until I retreat with my men, and we will then go to the steamer," cried Captain Chase.

"Come, Mendoza!" cried Hotspur Harry, and the two disappeared to find Lucita and the Senora Mendoza, and take them to where Rafael Agramonte and his party were waiting ready to answer a call for help if it came or to dash away to the mountains, where word came that all was well.

It took but a short while for the Boy Bugler and Mendoza to find Lucita and Senora Mendoza, and they started to join Rafael, Stella, and the Cowboy Patriots. Half an hour after the charge of Captain Chase and his men the retreat of the Cowboy Clan had begun.

The rescue had been reported to Rafael Agramonte, and he and his men went dashing toward the mountains to join Gomez, Stella riding by the side of her husband.

Captain Chase knew that the Spaniards from the other camps would soon be upon them, and in force, so the dead and wounded cowboys were quickly gathered and then the retreat was begun to the steamer.

Back came the Cowboy Filibusters, fighting the gathering Spaniards as they returned, and reaching the deck of the Mustang orders were given to set the Gatling guns to going.

This was done as the Mustang backed out of the lagoon, while, suddenly over

the storm-swept waters came a light that revealed the vessel.

"It is the overseer's house!" cried Captain Chase, and he turned to the captain and ordered him to stop the steamer, for he beheld in the light a man on the cliff waving frantically to the vessel.

When the screw had stopped turning all listened and the man cried in broken English:

"Captain Agramonte took the Senorita Lucita, her brother, and those with them up to the mountains with his party, so they will remain with the patriots in Cuba!"

The words fell like a blow upon all who heard them.

They had rescued the Boy Bugler and his sister, and they had remained upon the island.

"My God! I thought they were all safe in the cabin of the steamer," cried Captain Chase in almost despair.

"No, sir, only Captain Telfair is there, and he is dying from a wound he received.

"No one came aboard, sir, except you and your men," said the steward of the steamer.

Raising his voice, Captain Chase called out loudly to the man on the cliff:

"Why did they not come to the steamer as agreed?"

"They were cut off from doing so, and had to go with Senor Agramonte," answered the man, and with the last word he was seen to turn and fly away from the cliff, as though for his life.

"Too bad! Too bad! Too bad!" said a cowboy.

"Oh, no, for had we not come Harry would have been shot at daybreak, or his sister been forced to marry Major Bartello to save his life, for that much I learned.

"The expedition has been a great success," responded Captain Chase, cheerily.

But all knew that he deeply felt the disappointment in not bringing Lucita and the Boy Bugler out of Cuba with him.

With her prow pointed out into the gulf, the Mustang pushed on under a full head of steam, her way lighted by the burning house of the overseer, while the disappointed Spaniards were maddened with rage, and couriers were sent flying up and down the coast to send cruisers out of their harbors to pursue the daring Texan filibusters.

But as well might they have chased the wind, for the Mustang ran the coast of Cuba out of sight by dawn. But Captain Telfair had died, and the steamer was under charge of her first officer. The brave cowboys were landed some days after upon the coast of Texas under the shelter of night.

The Cowboy Filibusters dispersed to their ranches and their duties, and look wisely innocent when anything is hinted at to them of there having been a secret expedition of rescue to the Island of Cuba.

As for Captain Chase, he was not satisfied with his last filibustering venture, for the girl whom he had hoped to make his wife was in the Island of Cuba, as was also Hotspur Harry, and he made up his mind that it would not be very long before he would return there, even though it was to fight under the Lone Star Flag with a band of his Cowboy Clan to follow his lead.

And he was right, for not very long after the gallant Texan once more set sail for the Ever Faithful Isle to join those who were so dear to him there.

THE END.

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